

## REVIEW

# Violence against Women and What Is Being Done to Prevent Violence against Women in Northern Cyprus: A Review

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## Abstract

This study is a review article to provide information and create awareness on violence against women and what is being done to prevent violence against women in Northern Cyprus. Violence against women, which is considered as a public health issue, has been increased in Northern Cyprus during the pandemic period just like all around the world. Although there are no recent studies found in the literature, other studies on this subject found that one in every three women are exposed to physical violence in the country. There have been some important initiatives that are legal and supportive of women to prevent violence against women and to protect women against violence with the contribution of nongovernmental organizations. One of the most important steps in this process is that the "Law on Domestic Violence" was made and its emergency was approved by the parliamentary committee. It was determined that there were no sufficient policies developed to prevent violence against women, that the number of women's refuges and police domestic violence units was low and no special arrangement has been done for victims of violence in hospitals and private clinics. In this regard, it is recommended to provide on-the-job training to nurses working in this country about prevention, evaluation, detection, and management of violence against women and to develop protocols and standards in the units that fight against violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Nurse, Violence, Woman

## Introduction

This study was done to review scientific studies on violence against women, initiatives of non-governmental organizations, and existing legal regulations on the prevention of violence. The objective of this review is to provide information and create awareness on violence against women and what is being done to prevent violence against women in Northern Cyprus. The data collected with this review is believed to provide guidance to develop policies and laws and regulations to prevent violence and to protect against violence, and to develop work plans for units that fight against violence and to outline roles and responsibilities of nurses that work on primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare services.

Violence against women is a global problem which threatens both physical and mental health of women and prevents women from achieving economic and social development (Kara et al., 2018). According to the global indicators, violence against women which is considered as

an important public health issue has been increasing. Especially in countries that implemented lockdowns during the pandemic, violence against women has increased significantly and transformed into a hidden pandemic (Altın, 2021; UNFPA, 2020). Violence against women in Northern Cyprus has been addressed as a problem since 1930s (Masaroğulları & Uzunboylu, 2017). When studies on violence against women were searched in the literature before the pandemic, not many studies were found (Masaroğulları & Uzunboylu, 2017). The results of five studies that were done between the years 2007 and 2018 are worth mentioning. According to the results of a comprehensive study in Northern Cyprus, the frequency of domestic violence for women was 54.5% and of physical violence was 36.7% (Çakıcı et al., 2007). According to the results of a project of the Association of Women to Support Living (Women Support to Life Association KAYAD) in 2015, one in three women had been slapped even though not frequently and one in every five women were exposed to unwanted sexual behavior or kissing (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2019). In a study which compared domestic

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violence in districts in Northern Cyprus, the highest violence rates were seen in Gazimağusa and the most common form of violence was yelling (57.76%) and 14% of the women were forced to have sexual intercourse by their spouses (The Centre for Migration, Identity and Right Studies (CMIRS), 2012). According to the results of a study done in a private hospital in Northern Cyprus, 64.4% of the pregnant women presenting to the antenatal outpatient clinic were exposed to verbal violence before pregnancy and this percentage dropped to 56.2% during pregnancy (Mammadov et al., 2018). Additionally, the General Directorate of Security recorded 2243 cases of domestic violence in 2011 and 70% of these cases were not taken to court (Mertan et al., 2012). All of these studies demonstrate that the violence rates in the country are significantly high, and it should be addressed as early as possible.

The most negative effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the women's health is the increase in domestic violence (Azcona et al., 2020). Although there are no scientific studies that show the latest situation in violence against women during the pandemic in Northern Cyprus, it was noted that the number of women presenting to the violence unit increased by 3 fold in 2021 (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2021). There is a need for scientific studies that show the current situation in domestic violence during the pandemic in the country.

Bargirls who are a risk group for violence against women in Northern Cyprus are also an important problem. Due to unemployment, the country receives many female immigrants (Güven Lisaniler et al., 2005). In 2009, 961 women were given permission to work as "bargirls" and 14 women were given permission to work as "barmaids" in 2 pubs and 42 night clubs (Paşa, 2012). In the Turkish Language Society, a bargirl is defined as "a woman who is paid to entertain patrons in a bar, night club etc. for the profit of her employer" (Turkish Language Society (TDK), 2020). In the country the number of bargirls actively working was over 400 in 2017 and the as these women have to work as bargirls because they are desperate, this is considered as a violation of human rights (Aliefendioğlu, 2013). Although it is stated that women working in night clubs are working there on their own volition, it is also worth noting that there are no laws of human trafficking in Northern Cyprus and bargirls can be victims of human trafficking and this can be considered as an important type of violence (Aliefendioğlu, 2013; Paşa, 2012; Güven-Lisaniler et al., 2005). According to the results of a survey done by KAYAD through TV shows, 82% of the participants

believe that there is human trafficking in the country (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2019).

The social consequences of human trafficking are destructive and unacceptable, so it is thought that policies to prevent human trafficking should be developed in Northern Cyprus.

### **Violence against Women and Prevention of Violence against Women**

When we look at the legal aspect of prevention of violence in the country; the parliament signing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 can be considered as an important first step. The second important step was the Family Law which was enacted in 1998 to protect women and children against physical, sexual, material and emotional abuse at home (Masaroğulları & Uzunboyulu, 2017; Supreme Court of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, 2021). However, the Family Law does not offer legal aid; therefore, it is claimed to be insufficient to prevent domestic violence (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2021). With the Law no 58/2011 of the Northern Cyprus Parliament, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was approved (Supreme Court of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, 2021). According to the Convention, significantly more efforts should be made to prevent violence against women and to protect them against violence. In 2014, the Social Gender Equality Office (Foundation, Duties, and Work Principles) (TOCED) Law no 61/2014 was enacted which represents a major tool for the fight against domestic violence (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2021). Pursuant to the article no 24 of the TOCED Law, a unit dedicated to fight against violence in Dr. Burhan Nalbantoğlu Public Hospital was an important action taken against violence (Ministry of Health, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, 2019). No special arrangement had been done for violence victims in hospitals and private clinics in Northern Cyprus (Mertan et al., 2012). Therefore, it seems important to increase the number of such units in hospitals. An important legal step was taken in 2021 to prevent violence and to protect against violence. The domestic violence law which was drawn by KAYAD with the support of 25 organizations was immediately approved by the parliament on May 17, 2021, but not put into force yet. When the bill concerning prevention of domestic violence and protection of domestic violence victims is put into force, it is estimated that comprehensive frameworks, policies, and measures will be developed for all departments and units who work to prevent violence and protect victims. Defining types of violence other than physical violence in the law will allow identifying victims of violence and putting up an effective fight against violence (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2021).

With the increasing violence against women, it is very important for countries to develop preventive policies. The government in Northern Cyprus has not developed any policies to prevent violence against women and protect women against violence especially domestic violence during the pandemic.

#### **Main Points**

- During the pandemic period, violence against women has increased in Northern Cyprus as well as in the whole world.
- With the contributions of non-governmental organizations, there have been some important legal and women-supportive initiatives for the prevention of violence against women and the protection of women against violence.
- In a study, it was determined that one out of every three women was exposed to physical violence.

Support systems for women should be built: the number of women's refuges should be increased and they should be kept open during the pandemic; women that are victims of violence should be provided financial and social support, free consultancy, psychotherapy, and legal aid services that are offered online (Aygüneş & Ok, 2020; Azcona et al., 2020). Nevertheless, non-governmental organization should run awareness and information campaigns to show that women who are victims of domestic violence are not alone. Nongovernmental organizations should work more actively to prevent violence, to create ideas, to actively support the actions taken to prevent violence, and to give suggestions for draft bills to defend basic rights and freedoms of women (Masaroğulları & Uzunboyulu, 2017). Northern Cyprus has taken important steps in this sense. There are 42 non-governmental organizations that focus on women's problems in the country, and these organizations are mostly located in Famagusta and Nicosia (Çiftçi, 2020). These non-governmental organizations that focus on women's problems carry out important work to prevent all kinds of discrimination against women and to reinforce women's role in the society to achieve social gender equality. KAYAD's free of charge online legal consultancy and psychotherapy services for domestic violence victims during the pandemic can be an example for the work carried out by such nongovernmental organizations to prevent violence against women and to protect women against violence. Furthermore, a domestic violence guideline was developed for healthcare personnel, police, press members, educators, and lawyers. There is only one women's refuge, which is managed by Nicosia Turkish Municipality to offer a safe place for women who are victims of violence. Additionally, there is only one department for violence against women in the General Directorate of Security, which is in Nicosia. Non-governmental organizations working on women's problems continue their work to ensure that there is one of such a unit in every district (Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2019; Women Support to Life Association (KAYAD), 2021).

### **The Role of Nurses in Prevention, Detection, and Management of Violence against Women**

Healthcare professionals should be involved in the initiatives that support and treat violence victims and prevent violence and they even should play an effective role in preventing and creating effective solutions for violence (Aktaş et al., 2019). Thus, nurses as healthcare workers have a major responsibility and role to prevent, detect, and manage violence. A study in the literature found that nurses did not take sufficient responsibility for providing consultancy and treatment to women presenting to healthcare institutions as victims of violence (Häggbloom et al., 2005). Some studies found that nurses often felt that they did not have enough information to provide care to women who are victims of violence and that they felt themselves inadequate (Alshammari et al., 2018; Koştı & Toraman, 2021). Additionally, the authors of another study claimed that nurses did not have sufficient information and training to have the right attitude and behaviour to manage violence against women (Alhalal, 2020) while the authors of another study emphasized the need to dedicate more time on this matter (Gomez-Fernandez et al., 2017).

Nurses, as required as a result of their responsibility for protecting and improving family and public health, for treatment and for rehabilitation where necessary, should assume the role of being an educator, advocate, consultant, and caregiver for women who are exposed to violence (Dağlar et al., 2017). Nurses should provide necessary care, consultancy, and guidance to prevent violence as primary, secondary, and tertiary protection steps (Pınar & Sabacioğulları, 2019; Sabancioğulları et al., 2016).

Nurses should take precautions to prevent violence, provide training, consultancy for anger management and control, organize, and communicate support systems to prevent crisis within the scope of primary protection (Bahadır Yılmaz & Öz, 2019). Additionally, risky groups should be identified with early detection and necessary measures should be taken accordingly. Nurses can play a key role in the safety plans, in ensuring easy access to help and support against violence and in protecting against risks caused by violence (Aktaş et al., 2019; Doran & Hutchinson, 2017; Öztürk et al., 2016).

When we look at the roles and responsibilities of nurses in the second and tertiary healthcare services for violence against women, nurses are responsible for identifying violence and signs of violence, collecting data, providing care and treatment, providing information and consultancy, taking necessary records, and referring victims to relevant departments (Dikmen & Marakoğlu, 2019).

For nurses who often make the first contact with female victims with the opportunity to prevent violence against women due to increasing number of cases of violence, it is essential to understand and analyze the symptoms and take actions accordingly (Gomez-Fernandez et al., 2017).

This review concludes that cases of violence against women are not infrequent and even have increased with the pandemic, that there are no sufficient policies developed to prevent violence against women, that the number of women's refuges and police domestic violence units is not enough and no arrangement has been done for victims of violence in hospitals and private clinics. Therefore, the authors suggest that the existing law on domestic violence be put into force, the government develop policies to prevent violence against women and build support systems for the victims and that further studies be done. In this regard, it is recommended to provide on-the-job training to nurses working in this country about prevention, evaluation, detection, and management of violence against women and to develop relevant protocols and standards in the organizations.

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